Fiveleaf Akebia

Chocolate Vine
Akebia quinata (Houtt.) Dcne.

NATIVE RANGE: Central China to Korea and Japan.

DESCRIPTION: A twining woody vine in the Lardizabalaceae family. This species is a vigorous groundcover having slender, rounded green stems when young and brown at maturity. The alternate, palmate leaves are divided into approximately five oval leaflets, 1½ to 3 inches long, with a purplish tinge that become blue-green at maturity. Fragrant, chocolate-purple colored flowers appear in late March to early April. Fruits are purple-violet, flattened sausage-like pods, 2 1/4 to 4 inches in length, ripening in late September to early October. Inside the pods have a whitish pulpy core with many tiny black seeds. Five leaf akebia is deciduous in cooler climates but may remain evergreen in the warmer regions, such as Louisiana.

ECOLOGICAL THREAT: Akebia grows so quickly that, if left unmanaged, it can kill off existing ground level vegetation, understory shrubs and trees, and even some canopy trees, by overtopping and smothering them. Once established, its dense growth prevents seed germination and seedling establishment of native plants.

DISTRIBUTION IN THE UNITED STATES: Five leaf akebia is found in 16 eastern states shown in green on the US map.

HABITAT IN THE UNITED STATES: Akebia is shade and drought tolerant and can invade many types of habitats. Its growth appears to be restricted only by the height of the object it is entangling.

BIOLOGY & SPREAD: Akebia spreads primarily by vegetative means and is capable of growing twenty to forty feet in a single growing season. Fruits are not always produced and the seeds of akebia are not known to be carried by wind or insects. While birds may play a role in seed dispersal, five leaf akebia is vectored primarily through inadvertent activities of humans.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: For small infestations of akebia mechanical control by cutting to the ground repeated throughout the season. Akebia vines may also be dug up, removing as much of the roots as possible. For large infestations, use of herbicides, such as glyphosate (e.g., Roundup) or triclopyr (e.g., Garlon), is probably the most effective method to control akebia. An herbicidal soap, such as pelargonic acid (e.g., Scythe), which provides a burn down of plant tissues, may also provide some control.

Reference: www.nps.gov